

## **Conventional standard sized commercially manufactured external cotton breast prosthesis versus customised hand-knitted ones?**

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women worldwide and in Singapore. A mastectomy, which is a surgery to remove all breast tissue from a breast, may be done as part of treatment for breast cancer. For post mastectomy patients, the use of external breast prosthesis and having a well-fitted prosthesis are integral in the recovery process. These prostheses improve body image and quality of life, as well as reduce the associated emotional distress. Several factors such as shape, appearance to self, appearance to others affect the users' sense of wellbeing, self-confidence and femininity. However, there are very few research studies on external breast prosthesis and fitting. In this interview, **Ms Teresa Ng Ruey Pyng**, Assistant Director of Nursing, Division of Nursing from KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH), shares about her research comparing the experience between the use of conventional standard sized commercially manufactured prosthesis and the customised hand-knitted ones amongst post single mastectomy patients.

### **Q1: How did you get interested in studying the experience of use of breast prosthesis?**

Studies have shown that body image impacts patients with breast cancer who are required to undergo a mastectomy (removal of the whole breast). It has a direct effect on a patient's psychosocial and emotional feelings. This area of study is challenging and critical, especially in supporting patients in their road to recovery.

### **Q2: what are the major challenges or inconvenience for post single mastectomy patients to wear breast prosthesis?**

One of the major challenges for patients after a single mastectomy is to ensure that they can have a well-fitted breast prosthesis that also stays in position. This helps patients feel comfortable and complete again. It certainly improves body image leading to improved quality of life.

### **Q3: Can you briefly introduce your study and what are the major research findings?**

This study involves about 150 participants recruited from KKH, the largest academic medical centre specialising in women's and children's health. The results showed that about seven out of 10 of the participants are in favour of the customised prosthesis. Most participants reported that the customised prostheses looked more natural, more comfortable and convenient as they could use their existing bras before their operations. Some participants even continued to use these prostheses instead of progressing to silicone prostheses.

**Q4: Do you have any future research plan based on this study?**

We would like to explore further on how external prostheses impact the quality of life of women who have undergone a mastectomy.

**Q5. Do you have any advice on choosing prosthesis for post-mastectomy patients?**

After a mastectomy, patients may become sad after losing a breast. However, the availability of various prostheses options would assure them and make them feel secure. The most important factor in choosing a prosthesis is comfort. If the patient feels comfortable, she will inherently feel confident and good about herself after wearing the prosthesis. The objective is to make these women feel complete again, providing them with a sense of well-being, confidence and femininity. Furthermore, patients at KKH could also speak to a “Blossom Buddy” (volunteer survivor) who had a mastectomy. The sharing by the volunteer may give them the encouragement to feel complete again, with a sense of confidence that they are not alone.

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**Researcher portfolio**

This study was completed by the team led by Ms Teresa Ng Ruey Pyng, Assistant Director of Nursing, Division of Nursing, KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital. Her research interests are on improving breast cancer patients’ care and education, survivorship and quality of life.